

The Baby-Friendly Hospital

February 2009

Thanks to the initiative of the Family-Childhood-Youth Programme team, the CSSS des Sommets has become the first full-service institution in Quebec to be granted the “Baby-Friendly Hospital” designation by UNICEF. In our case, at the CSSS des Sommets, this includes the hospital in Ste. Agathe plus CLSCs in Ste. Agathe, Mont Tremblant and Labelle, as well as long-term residential care facilities in all three of those places.

The United Nations, through UNICEF and the World Health Organization, established a list of criteria in 1990 that includes 10 specific steps to support successful breastfeeding. Since this initiative began, more than 15,000 facilities in 134 countries, including 6,000 in China alone, have been awarded Baby-Friendly status and health outcomes have improved substantially wherever this has been achieved.

Last July, a team of seven inspectors from Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick came to the hospital. They were examining compliance with the criteria established to objectively measure the support given to new mothers to encourage them to breastfeed their babies. Their report underscored the professionalism of our team as well as the respect that they show to their clientele.

To achieve the status of Baby-Friendly Hospital, the CSSS des Sommets has, over the past few years, instituted all ten of the requirements.

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all healthcare staff
2. Train all healthcare staff in the skills necessary to implement the policy
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding
4. Help new mothers initiate breastfeeding within a half-hour of the birth
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed and maintain lactation, even if they are separated from their babies
6. Give newborn infants no other food or drink other than breast milk, unless medically indicated
7. Practice rooming-in, allowing mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand rather than on a schedule
9. Give no pacifiers or other artificial teats to breastfeeding infants
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer new mothers to them when they leave the hospital

Among the measures taken to ensure compliance with the above criteria, free or reduced-price samples of commercial baby formula are not given out to new mothers as they had been in the past. Collaboration among the staff, the doctors, and support groups such as Nourri-Source has made it possible to raise the rate of exclusive breastfeeding at the time of leaving the hospital from 72% in 1996 to 97% in 2008. Rooming-in 24 hours a day was begun in 2005 as was the practice of immediate skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby, along with early nursing to encourage bonding and to reinforce the feelings of parental competence. The goal set by the provincial health ministry of 85% exclusive breastfeeding at discharge has been surpassed and work is ongoing to meet the further goals of extending breastfeeding to 70% at 2 months, 60% at 4 months, 50% at 6 months and 20% at a baby's first birthday.

In the near future, with the help of earmarked funds raised by the *Fondation médicale des Laurentides et des Pays-d'en-Haut*, major renovations will be made to the maternity centre of the hospital to make it better adapted to the needs of the families of newborns.

Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets